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SUBJECT: SECRETARY CLINTON'S MAY 28, 2009 MEETING WITH
EGYPTIAN DEMOCRACY ACTIVISTS

Classified by NEA Acting A/S David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (U) May 28, 2009; 10:50 ? 11:10 am; Washington, D.C.

¶2. (U) Participants:

U.S.

The Secretary
NEA Acting A/S Jeffrey Feltman
DRL Acting A/S Karen Stewart
NEA/PI Director Timothy Andrews
NEA/PI Charles Kiamie (notetaker)
NEA/ELA Julia Santucci

Egypt

Ahmed Abdelaziz
Alia Abdel-Raouf
Mohamed Adel Amin
May Desouki
Sally ElBaz
Randa Eldahab
Mona Ali El Dien
Nour Mohamed Khir Eldin
Ola Fahmy
Basem Fathy
Emad Fekry
Marianne Nagui Hanna
Mohsen Kamal
May Kosba
Amira Mostafa
Maged Sorour

Freedom House

Sherif Mansour

¶3. (SBU) Summary: Secretary Clinton May 28 met sixteen young Egyptian democracy activists as their two months of training and internships were drawing to an end. Professionals active in the promotion of democracy and human rights in Egypt, they offered thoughts on several elements of the bilateral relationship. The Secretary reinforced the Department's interest in broadening the political space and expanding civic participation in Egypt and elsewhere in the region. She stressed that pressing governments to respect human rights is an enduring, fundamental U.S. policy but that the Administration will sometimes make its case behind closed doors. The majority of the Fellows concurred that this approach was appropriate for Egypt. The Fellows enjoyed a 5-minute photo-op with the Secretary in front of a camera spray and then spent 10 minutes with her behind closed doors. End Summary.

¶4. (U) Sixteen visiting Egyptian democracy activists met Secretary Clinton as part of their USG-funded program, New Generation of Advocates. "New Gen" is implemented by Freedom House to train and develop networks of democracy activists from several Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries. Since May 2006, with support from USAID and NEA's Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the program has supported peaceful political change in MENA through fellowships and trainings in the region as well as the U.S., Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

DEMOCRACY: FRONT AND CENTER...

¶5. (U) After welcoming the Fellows, the Secretary made a statement highlighting the importance of their work and took questions, including one relevant to Egypt. Begin text:

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I am so honored to receive this group here at the State Department. This is a group of young men and women from Egypt who are committed to improving the lives of the Egyptian people, providing more economic opportunity, greater growth in democracy, respect for human rights. They come from a variety of backgrounds. Each of them brings a special experience, an expertise to their interests and their efforts.

I am excited about going to Egypt next week with President Obama for his speech. I've enjoyed the opportunities that I have had to work with my Egyptian counterparts on how we're going to deepen and broaden our relationship between our two countries. But the most important part of that relationship is between the American and Egyptian people. And I think that a number of our visitors have made their first trip to the United States with this trip. So it's wonderful to have you here and to be part of this.

I'm going to take a question or two, and then we'll go this way and have a chance to talk. Okay?

QUESTION: Madame Secretary?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Yes.

QUESTION: What progress has Egypt made toward democracy and human rights? Is it the main stumbling block, this emergency law that's been enforced for decades? And finally, how much of an issue will it be on your trip and the President's trip next week?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, we always raise democracy and human rights. It is a core pillar of American foreign policy. And I think that there is a great awareness on the part of the Egyptian Government that with young people like this and with enhanced communications, it is in Egypt's interest to move more toward democracy and to exhibit more respect for human rights. And so we're going to continue to engage in that dialogue.

Under Secretary Bill Burns will be going to Egypt soon to put in place a framework for a comprehensive discussion between our two countries on the whole range of issues. We're very appreciative of the strong role that Egypt is playing in looking for a way to bring Palestinians together. We appreciate what Egypt has done to try to support counterterrorism efforts which threaten Egypt and threaten many other countries.

And we are very committed to doing what we can to promote economic opportunity inside Egypt. We consider that a key part of our providing assistance to Egypt. We've spent, as you know, many billions of dollars over the last years promoting NGOs, promoting democracy, good governance, rule of law. And I want to stress economic opportunity because out of economic opportunity comes confidence, comes a recognition that people can chart their own future. So this is all part of what we will be discussing... End text.

...AND BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

¶6. (SBU) Upon leaving the Treaty Room, a representative of the Fellows read the following statement to the Secretary. Begin text, unedited:

Madame Secretary

I would like to you on behalf of my colleagues to have this meeting with you.

We are Freedom House's New Generation of Advocates. We peacefully advocate for a new vision of Democracy in Egypt.

Despite differences, Egyptian People share with Americans a common believe in Democratic ideals and Human Rights; and both can benefit from a free Egypt and the changes we are fighting for.

Democracy and Human Rights are urgently needed so Egyptians can build on a growing momentum at a critical time.

President Obama said to the Muslim World "We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist." We, the Muslim World extend our hand too.

We call for support the civil society organizations in Egypt and to restore the amount of funding for Egyptian Civil Society as they have a very important role to promote Democracy, Human Rights and Women's rights. End text.

¶7. (SBU) Secretary Clinton thanked the Fellows for their thoughts, saying the statement was "music to my ears," and invited their feedback and questions. Fellows asked the Secretary about USG support for civil society and democratization, the core elements of the USG-GOE relationship, and the nature of President Obama's forthcoming speech in Cairo to the Muslim World. They called for greater assistance to Egyptian NGOs, in spite of the global financial crisis, and stressed that there are other options aside from autocracy and fundamentalism (namely, the liberal youth activists who have organized via social networking sites). The Secretary told the Fellows that she was "in the middle" between grassroots activists and the GOE but emphasized that basic freedoms are not negotiable. She pointed out that economic opportunity and development can promote democracy and stressed that getting results through closed-door meetings with government officials can be preferable to lecturing in the media. Several Fellows agreed that private discussions could be very effective in Egypt and expressed gratitude to know they were taking place.

Comment

¶8. (C) This was the third cohort of New Gen Fellows to meet a sitting Secretary of State. The Secretary's meeting with this group of young professionals demonstrated USG support for reformers in the region and reinforced the Department's interest in encouraging political change led by the people of the region. The meeting was the lead story on state.gov the following day, and it generated more than 200 generally positive stories in the region and beyond. NEA and DRL look forward to remaining in contact with this cohort and all New Gen alumni.

CLINTON